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Letters to the Editor

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Crankshaw on Penkovsky

In his foreword to "The Penkovsky Papers" which you published with the first installment on Oct. 21, Edward Crankshaw makes one peculiar assertion, namely that Col. Oleg Penkovsky was "in some measure unbalanced." He supports this contention with another sweeping assertion that "a man who will take it upon himself to betray his government because he is uniquely convinced that he is right and it is wrong is by definition unbalanced."

Having thus laid a foundation for his argument, Mr. Crankshaw implies that Penkovsky's indictment of Khrushchev as a man actively preparing to launch a nuclear

war is false because the presumably mentally disordered colonel of the Soviet military intelligence could not possibly "distinguish between government intentions and government precautions" and that he almost certainly "confused loose, menacing talk with tight-lipped calculation; contingency planning with purposive strategy."

The so far published summaries by Frank Gibney and excerpts from the book fail to give the faintest evidence that Oleg Penkovsky was in any

way mentally unbalanced. Mr. Crankshaw's contention that anyone who betrays his government because he is convinced that his government is wrong "is by definition unbalanced" is ridiculous on the face of it. Whatever the British Kremlinologist might think of Benedict Arnold, the participants in the July 20, 1944, anti-Hitler plot, the Rosenbergs, Alger Hiss, Burgess and MacLean, Igor Gouzenko and the host of others, these men were not mentally sick either in the legal or clinical sense.

Another point is that Mr. Crankshaw—who does not for a moment question the authenticity of "The Penkovsky Papers"—presumes to know actual intentions of the Krom-

lin leadership better than a Soviet officer who directly and on a high level participated in the development of his government's strategic moves.

In fact, the reason for Mr. Crankshaw's warning not to trust Penkovsky is transparent to those familiar with the tenor of his many writings: Penkovsky's revelations run contrary to that line of

thought which Mr. Crankshaw represents and which stubbornly insists that the Soviet government under Khrushchev genuinely wished to become friendly with the West.

With all due respect for Mr. Crankshaw's concern in preserving his reputation as a Soviet expert, one cannot escape the conclusion that the technique he chose to employ to that end—that of discrediting Penkovsky's testimony by implying that the man was essentially insane—serves no good purpose. It does not mean that "The Penkovsky Papers" should be accepted uncritically. But it does mean that any serious critical analysis of them must be based on a much more solid foundation than that laid by Edward

Crankshaw. K. L. LONDON, V. PETROV,

Institute for Slavic Studies,
The George Washington Uni-
versity,

Washington.

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